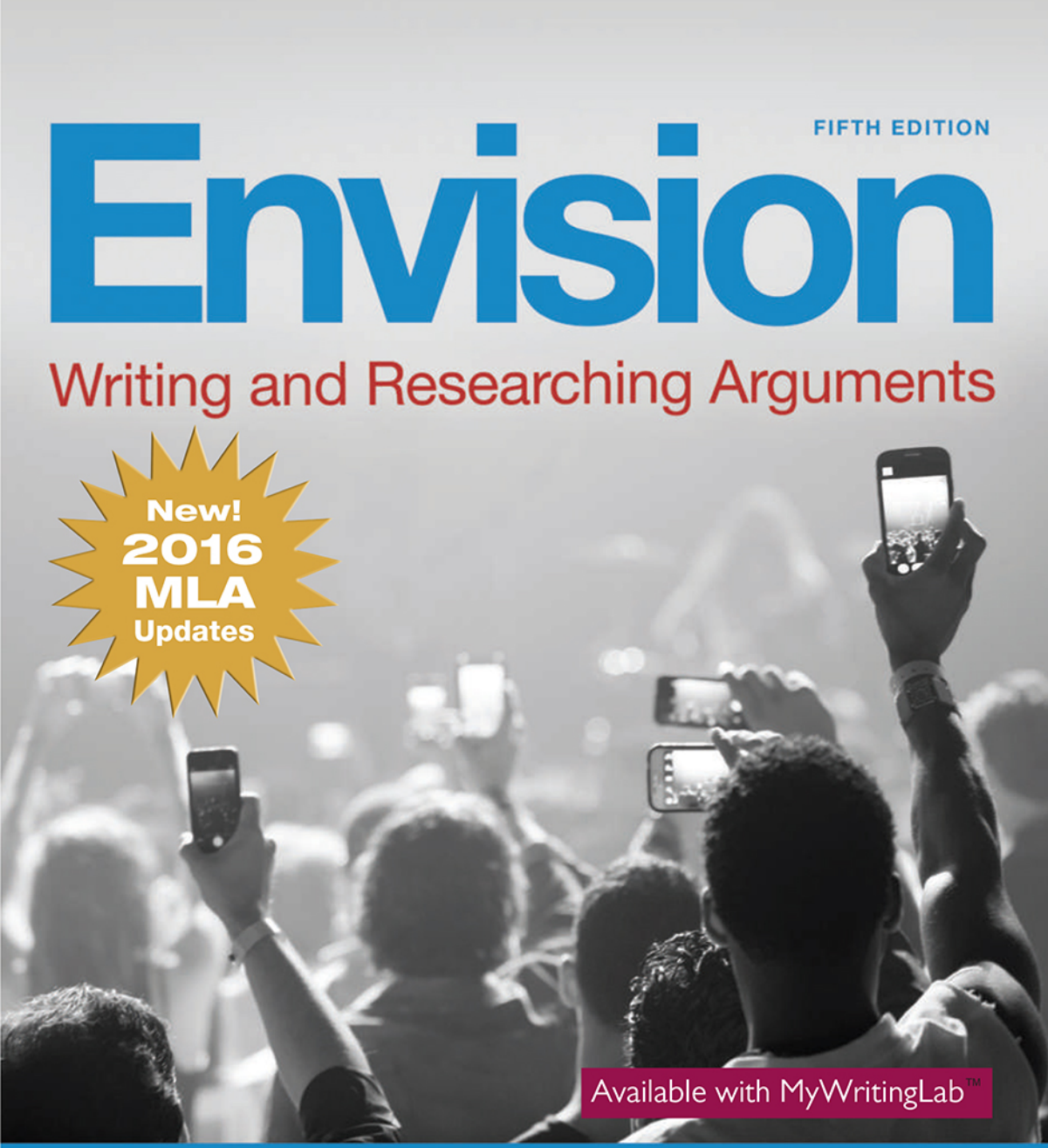
FIFTH EDITION

Envision

Writing and Researching Arguments



Christine L. Alfano Alyssa J. O'Brien

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WRITING AND RESEARCHING ARGUMENTS

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FIFTH EDITION

Christine L. Alfano and Alyssa J. O'Brien
Stanford University

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CONTENTS

Preface *xiii*

PART I: ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENT 1

Chapter 1 Analyzing Texts and Writing Thesis Statements 2

Understanding Texts Rhetorically 4

Understanding the Rhetorical Situation 7

Understanding Exigence and Purpose 9

Strategies for Analyzing Rhetorical Texts 13
- Analyzing Visual Rhetoric 15
- Analyzing Written Rhetoric 19
- **Reading:** David Horsey, "Obnoxious Freedom" 22
- **Reading:** Chris Baker, "Is Darth Disney Destroying Star Wars' Expanded Universe?" 25

Writing a Rhetorical Analysis 27
- Developing a Thesis Statement 29
- Analyzing Student Writing 32
- **Student Writing:** Alexandra Ramirez, "'Obnoxious Freedom': A Cartoonist's Defense of the Freedom to Be Crass" 32

The Writer's Process 37

Spotlighted Analysis: Editorial Cartoons 39

Writing Assignments 40

Chapter 2 Understanding Strategies of Persuasion 42

Identifying Strategies of Argumentation 44
- **Reading:** Ian Bogost, "Persuasive Games" 49

Understanding the Rhetorical Appeals 50
- Appeals to Emotion: *Pathos* 51
- Appeals to Reason: *Logos* 57
- Appeals to Character and Authority: *Ethos* 63

Combining the Rhetorical Appeals 70
Reading: Derek Thompson, "Turning Customers into Cultists" 70
Considering Context and Values: *Kairos* and *Doxa* 75
Reading an Ad Analysis 78
Student Writing: Clare Conrotto, "I'll Have the Lies on the Side, Please" 79
The Writer's Process 86
Spotlighted Analysis: Advertisements 86
Writing Assignments 87

Chapter 3 Composing Arguments 89

Understanding The Canons of Rhetoric 90
Invention in Argument 91
Arrangement in Argument 97
Using Classical Strategies of Arrangement 100
Using the Toulmin Model to Analyze or Arrange an Argument 102
Considering Rogerian Arguments 106
Exploring Effective Modes of Arrangement 108
Style in Argument 110
Constructing Your Persona 113
Choosing a Rhetorical Stance 115
Crafting A Position Paper 116
Composing a Title 118
Composing Your Introduction 121
Writing Your Conclusion 124
Analyzing a Position Paper 126
Reading: William C. Martel, "Ban on Photographing Military Coffins Protected Grieving Families from Media" 127
The Writer's Process 130
Spotlighted Analysis: Photographs 131
Writing Assignments 132

PART II: PLANNING AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH 135

Chapter 4 Planning and Proposing Research Arguments 136

Asking Research Questions 137

Generating Topics 141
- Constructing a Research Log 143

Narrowing Your Topic 144
- Using Prewriting Techniques to Focus Your Topic 144

Writing about Your Research Plans 151
- The Research Freewrite 152
- **Student Writing:** Rafe Salinas, "Research Freewrite" 152
- Drafting a Guiding Research Question and Research Hypothesis 154

Drafting a Research Proposal 156
- **Student Writing:** Molly Fehr, "Inspiring Nazi Germany: How Hitler Rose to Power through the Use of Propaganda and Rousing Rhetoric" 157

The Writer's Process 163

Spotlighted Analysis: Propaganda Posters 163

Writing Assignments 164

Chapter 5 Finding and Evaluating Research Sources 166

Visualizing Research 168

Developing Search Terms 169

Understanding Primary and Secondary Sources 174
- Finding Primary Sources 175
- Searching for Secondary Sources 177

Evaluating Your Sources 179
- Questions for Evaluating Sources 179
- **Reading:** Jennifer S. Light, "When Computers Were Women" 186

Using Field Research 187
- Conducting Interviews 188

Developing a Survey 190
Other Models of Fieldwork 194
Evaluating Field Research Sources 195
Evaluating Sources by Use 197

Creating a Dialogue with Your Sources 198
Student Writing: Kim Felser, "Dialogue of Sources" 200

Writing an Annotated Bibliography 202

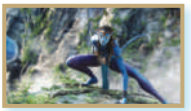
The Writer's Process 207

Spotlighted Analysis: Covers 208

Writing Assignments 209

PART III: DRAFTING AND DESIGNING ARGUMENTS 211

Chapter 6 Organizing and Writing Research Arguments 212



Organizing Your Draft in Visual Form 213

Learning Outlining Strategies 217
Developing a Formal Outline 218
Student Writing: Ada Throckmorton, "Research Paper—Outline" 222

Drafting Your Research Argument 226
Structuring Your Argument with Subheads 226
Connecting Your Ideas with Transitions 229
Integrating Research Sources into Your Draft 230
Documentation during Integration 238
Keeping Your Passion to Keep Writing 238

Analyzing a Student's Draft of a Research-Based Essay 239
Student Writing: Wanjin Park, "Environmental Leadership: How Al Gore Illuminated an Overlooked Crisis" 240

Revising Your Draft 246
Troubleshooting 246
Collaboration Through Peer Feedback 249
Analyzing a Student's Revision of a Research-Based Essay 251
Student Writing: Wanjin Park, "Balancing the Soft and the Passionate Rhetorician: Gore's Dynamic Rhetoric in His Environmental Leadership" 252

The Writer's Process 262
Spotlighted Analysis: Film Trailers 262
Writing Assignments 263

Chapter 7 Documenting Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism 265

Understanding Intellectual Property and Plagiarism 266
Avoiding Unintentional Plagiarism 268
Working with Images and Multimedia as Sources 269
Understanding Documentation Style 269
In-Text Citations: Documentation as Cross-Referencing 271
Using Footnotes and Endnotes 276
Producing a Works Cited List in MLA Style 276
Documentation for Print and Online Text-Based Sources 277
Documentation for Visual, Audio, and Multimedia Sources 282
Student Paper in MLA Style 287
Student Writing: Stephanie Parker, "Soompi and the "Honorary Asian": Shifting Identities in the Digital Age" 287
The Writer's Process 293
Writing Assignments 294

Chapter 8 Designing Arguments 296

Understanding Document Design and Decorum 298
Understanding Academic Writing Conventions 299
Integrating Images in Academic Writing 302
Design of Academic Papers 303
Tools of Design for Academic Audiences 305
Writing an Abstract 305
Constructing Your Bio 307
Student Writing: Eric Wiebacher, Bio 307
Creating a Portfolio 308
Formatting Writing for Audience and Purpose 311

Reading: London Greenpeace, "What's Wrong with the Body Shop?" 312

Designing Arguments in Popular Formats 317
Crafting an Op-Ad 318
Student Writing: Angie Sorentino, "It's Not Worth It" 319
Creating a Photo Essay 320
Student Writing: Conor Henriksen, "Art on Campus" 321
Composing in Newsletter or Magazine Format 322
Student Writing: Miranda Smith, "Charities Taking Action Against Hunger" 323
Composing a Website 324
Student Writing: Hailey Larkin, "The Visual Rhetoric of Protest" 327
Creating a Podcast 328
Producing an Online Video 330
Designing a Poster 332
Developing a Multimedia Presentation 334

The Writer's Process 338

Writing Assignments 339

Credits 341
Index 345

PREFACE

The Story of This Book

Several years ago, we (the authors) met as colleagues in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford University. Our shared focus on teaching writing through attention to both written and multimedia texts led us to look for materials we could use in the classroom that would provide both excellence in pedagogical instruction—attending to such essentials as thesis statements, style, integrating sources, and avoiding plagiarism—along with cutting edge and even *fun* examples that offer sound rhetorical models for analysis and research. While we were able to gather materials from a variety of sources, our students wanted more than a collection of handouts: they wanted a textbook that they could use to guide and inspire their development as writers.

The result was *Envision*, an argument and research guide designed from the ground up to serve the needs of real student writers. In fact, throughout the many editions, students remain an indispensable part of the process, reading our drafts in progress, offering suggestions, and submitting their own writing as examples. Now in its fifth edition, *Envision* has expanded and changed over time, but remains true to its original vision: guiding students through the processes of analysis, argument, source evaluation, and research-based essay writing while keeping the examples fresh and relevant to student lives. Students learn to analyze both written texts and a range of visual texts, from cartoons and ads to websites and film, while working through the nuts of bolts of writing thesis statements, titles, introductions, conclusions, in-text citations, and MLA-style bibliographies. Additional writing lessons focus on diverse modes of argument, plagiarism, academic document design, and multimodal production.

As we now finalize the fifth edition of *Envision* and the fourth edition of *Envision in Depth* (with readings), our continued hope is that this textbook might help students develop the skills, confidence, and enthusiasm for writing, researching, and communicating effectively about issues that matter to them.

What's New in This Edition

Feedback from our insightful reviewers as well as suggestions from the many students and instructors who have used *Envision* and *Envision in Depth*

in the classroom have been indispensable in guiding our most recent revisions. In this new edition, you'll find the same commitment to supporting our readers in developing critical competencies in analysis, argumentation, and research as in prior editions. However, you'll also find increased attention to helping students accomplish the following learning outcomes:

- **Learn from Model Writing:** New and updated annotated articles and student writing show readers exactly how to move from invention to argument, whether they are analyzing a written text, a visual text, or developing a research-based argument.
- **Experiment with Different Modes of Argumentation**: The refreshed section in Chapter 3 on classical argumentation, Toulmin logic, and Rogerian argument offers students guidance in exploring different strategies of arrangement to construct effective arguments.
- **Explore Contemporary Issues:** New readings and examples have been integrated into *Envision*, focusing on relevant and timely cultural issues: the BlackLivesMatter movement, the Charlie Hebdo shootings, the "cult" of Apple products, fast-food marketing, the influence of online social networks, photo manipulation in teen fashion magazines, women in computer science, the addictive properties of sugar, vegetarianism, and texting and driving.
- **Understand Advanced Concepts in Rhetoric:** In addition to the focus on rhetorical appeals and the canons of rhetoric found in prior editions, this new edition features expanded coverage of *ethos* and *logos*, as well as more detailed examination of persona and rhetorical stance.
- **Focus on the Writing Process:** Expanded sections on invention in Chapters 3, 4, and 6—complete with additional student samples—encourage students to find modes of prewriting that best suit their learning style, writing habits, and the parameters of their writing tasks.
- **Develop Strategies for Analyzing Arguments in Diverse Media:** Student writing in the chapters showcases ways to analyze a variety of types of argument, from written to visual arguments. In addition to guided instruction in the body of each chapter, the Spotlighted Analysis feature offers students the opportunity to apply strategies of rhetorical analysis to a diverse range of texts, from traditional written

arguments, to political cartoons, advertisements, photographs, posters, Websites, and even film trailers.

- **Engage Deeply with the Research Process:** A refreshed section on search methodologies includes discussion of adapting search methodology to different search engines (i.e., Google vs. academic databases) and how to effectively conduct Boolean searches. In addition, the streamlined discussion of evaluating sources is designed to provide students with a useful process for assessing materials for their own research once they find them. Lastly, a brief introduction to Joseph Bizzup's BEAM approach to research encourages students to move beyond categorizing sources in terms of primary and secondary materials to considering how to use those sources to produce effective research-based arguments.

The Substance at a Glance

From the very beginning, our philosophy in *Envision* has been to teach students about writing, rhetoric, and research by considering the different modes of argument that operate in our culture every day. Each chapter uses interactive and engaging lessons, and focuses both on analyzing and producing words (print materials, articles, blog posts, and even tweets) as well as on writing *about* images and other contemporary media (cartoons, ads, photographs, films, video games, and websites, to name a few). In this way, the book teaches *critical literacy* about all kinds of texts. Moreover, we provide numerous student writing examples and professional, published readings—both with annotations—in order to reinforce the writing lessons in each chapter and to demonstrate how students might successfully implement such strategies in their own texts. Our aim is to help students accomplish specific writing tasks for your courses as they encounter, analyze, research, and produce a range of compositions.

We have designed *Envision* to be flexible enough to adjust to different curricula or teaching styles. You can either follow the chronological sequence of chapters—moving from analysis to argument, bringing in research, and then considering design and presentations—or you can consult the chapters and assignments in any order that meets the needs of your course and curriculum. More specifically, we have organized *Envision* into three parts:

Part I: Analysis and Argument

Chapters 1 through 3 encourage students to become proficient, careful readers of rhetorical texts and to learn practical strategies for crafting thesis statements, rhetorical analysis essays, and position papers incorporating various perspectives. Students learn how to analyze the forms of persuasion in verbal and visual texts—from short articles and essays to political cartoons, ads, and photos—with an emphasis on rhetorical conventions. At the same time, we teach students key rhetorical concepts for effective communication, such as attending to audience, understanding rhetorical appeals and fallacies, and attending to exigency and motive.

Part II: Planning and Conducting Research

Chapters 4 and 5 focus on strategies of research argument for sustained writing projects. The lessons in this section of the book take students through key writing practices: writing a research proposal, keeping a research log, locating sources, and understanding the complexities of evaluating and documenting sources. Students have sample proposals, outlines, and annotations to consult as well as articles, propaganda posters, and websites to analyze.

Part III: Drafting and Designing Arguments

Chapters 6, 7, and 8 teach students how to write and deliver an effective research-based argument, with a focus on the process of drafting and revising. Students learn how to identify, assess, and incorporate research into their own arguments, while avoiding plagiarism and accomplishing successful documentation of sources. They learn to present their writing effectively through a discussion of document design—both for academic papers and for visual and multimodal arguments. They also gain important skills in practicing the canons of rhetoric and differentiating among levels of decorum.

Meeting WPA Outcomes for Writers

Each chapter offers specific activities and assignments designed to help students meet the WPA Outcomes for First-Year Composition. The following table indicates the chapter's specific learning goals as they are aligned with the WPA outcomes statement, the major assignments offered in each chapter, and the media focus.

Online Resources

The Instructor's Manual

The Instructor's Manual for *Envision* provides teachers with pedagogical advice for each chapter, including conceptual overviews, teaching tips for working with the main concepts and reading selections in the chapter, and suggestions for classroom exercises and writing assignments. The Instructor's Manual also offers ideas for organizing the reading and exercises according to days of the week. For access to the Instructor's Manual, please contact your Pearson representative.

MyWritingLab for Composition

MyWritingLab is an online practice, tutorial, and assessment program that provides engaging experiences for teaching and learning.

MyWritingLab includes most of the writing assignments from your accompanying textbook. Now, students can complete and submit assignments, and teachers can then track and respond to submissions easily—right in MyWritingLab—making the response process easier for the instructor and more engaging for the student.

In the Writing Assignments, students can use instructor-created peer review rubrics to evaluate and comment on other students' writing. When giving feedback on student writing, instructors can add links to activities that address issues and strategies needed for review. Instructors may link to multimedia resources in Pearson Writer, which include curated content from Purdue OWL. Paper review by specialized tutors through SmartThinking is available, as is plagiarism detection through TurnItIn.

Respond to Student Writing with Targeted Feedback and Remediation

MyWritingLab unites instructor comments and feedback with targeted remediation via rich multimedia activities, allowing students to learn from and through their own writing.

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

CHAPTER TITLE	WPA OBJECTIVES MET BY THIS CHAPTER	MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS	MEDIA FOCUS
1: Analyzing Texts and Writing Thesis Statements	■ Understanding the rhetorical situation ■ Considering relationships among audience, text, and purpose ■ Textual analysis ■ Developing thesis statements	■ Personal narrative essay ■ Rhetorical analysis essay	■ Cartoons, comic strips, and editorial articles
2: Understanding Strategies of Persuasion	■ Strategies of argumentation ■ Understanding rhetorical appeals: *logos, pathos,* and *ethos* ■ Fallacies or exaggerated uses of rhetorical appeals ■ Importance of *kairos* and *doxa*	■ Contextual analysis essay ■ Analysis of rhetorical appeals and fallacies ■ Comparison/contrast essay	■ Advertisements and written analysis of ads
3: Composing Arguments	■ Introductions and conclusions ■ Arrangement and structure of argument ■ Considering various modes of argument: Toulmin, Rogerian ■ Developing persona and rhetorical stance ■ Addressing opposing opinion in an argument ■ Writing with style	■ Position paper ■ Classical argument assignment ■ Toulmin and Rogerian argument analysis ■ Synthesis essay	■ Photographs, newspaper articles and images, opinion pieces, visual analysis essays
4: Planning and Proposing Research Arguments	■ Generating and narrowing research topics ■ Prewriting strategies ■ Developing a research plan ■ Drafting a formal proposal	■ Visual brainstorm ■ Research log ■ Informal research plan ■ Research proposal	■ Propaganda posters, historical images, rhetorical analysis essay

CHAPTER TITLE	WPA OBJECTIVES MET BY THIS CHAPTER	MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS	MEDIA FOCUS
5: Finding and Evaluating Research Sources	■ Research strategies ■ Evaluating sources ■ Distinguishing between primary and secondary sources ■ Locating sources ■ Conducting field research, interviews, and surveys ■ Best practices for note taking	■ Critical evaluation of sources ■ Annotated bibliography ■ Field research ■ Dialogue of sources	■ Magazine and journal covers, Websites, and annotated bibliographies
6: Organizing and Writing Research Arguments	■ Organizing and outlining arguments ■ Multiple drafts and revision ■ Integrating research sources: summary, paraphrase, and quotations ■ Writing and peer review	■ Formal outline ■ Peer review and response ■ Integrating sources ■ Writing the research argument	■ Film and movie trailers, film review and critique, drafts and revisions
7: Documenting Sources and Avoiding Plagiarism	■ Understanding intellectual property ■ Best practices in documenting sources: in-text citation and notes ■ MLA-style rules and examples	■ Working with multimedia sources ■ Ethical note-taking ■ Citation practice ■ Producing a Works Cited list	■ Documentation examples, MLA-style essay
8: Designing Arguments	■ Understanding the conventions of academic writing ■ Writing an abstract and bio ■ Decorum: appropriate voice and tone ■ Relationship between rhetorical situation and types of argument ■ Formatting and genre considerations ■ Transforming written arguments into visual or spoken texts	■ Writing an abstract ■ Constructing a bio ■ Integrating images in academic writing ■ Creating electronic arguments using multimedia (audio and visual) ■ Considering different delivery techniques	■ Academic design examples, abstracts, bios, op-ads, photo essays, Websites, posters, slidedecks, and multiple media

Writing Help for Varying Skill Levels

For students who enter the course at widely varying skill levels, MyWritingLab provides unique, targeted remediation through personalized and adaptive instruction. Starting with a preassessment known as the Path Builder, MyWritingLab diagnoses students' strengths and weaknesses on prerequisite writing skills. The results of the preassessment inform each student's Learning Path, a personalized pathway for students to work on requisite skills through multimodal activities. In doing so, students feel supported and ready to succeed in class.

Learning Tools for Student Engagement

Learning Catalytics Generate class discussion, guide lectures, and promote peer-to-peer learning with real-time analytics. MyLab and Mastering with eText now provide Learning Catalytics—an interactive student response tool that uses students' smartphones, tablets, or laptops to engage them in more sophisticated tasks and thinking.

MediaShare MediaShare allows students to post multimodal assignments easily—whether they are audio, video, or visual compositions—for peer review and instructor feedback. In both face-to-face and online course settings, MediaShare saves instructors valuable time and enriches the student learning experience by enabling contextual feedback to be provided quickly and easily.

Direct Access to MyLab Users can link from any Learning Management System (LMS) to Pearson's MyWritingLab. Access MyLab assignments, rosters, and resources, and synchronize MyLab grades with the LMS gradebook. A new direct, single sign-on provides access to all the personalized learning MyLab resources that make studying more efficient and effective.

Visit www.mywritinglab.com for more information.

Acknowledgments

Our work with *Envision* and *Envision in Depth* has spanned many years, students, writing classes, and colleagues. However, one element remains constant: It started out inherently collaborative and remains so. The revisions we have made in this edition and our ongoing work in this field could only have been accomplished through the ongoing support and guidance from others. For that reason, we'd like to offer our deepest thanks to all those who helped us with the book over the years, and in the revision of this edition in particular.

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In addition, we are grateful to our other "reviewers"—our students who use our textbook in the classroom and who are always happy to share praise—or suggestions—about Envision. In particular, we are grateful for the students who played a concrete role into shaping this new revision by contributing their own writing to serve as models to inspire our readers: Oishi Banerjee, Ali Batouli, Tucker Burnett, Vincent Chen, Clare Conratto, Molly Fehr, Will Hang, Savi Hawkins, Samantha Kargilis, Lucas Lin, Catherine Mullings, Emmanuel Omvenga, Ryan O'Rourke, Wanjin Park, Stephanie Parker, Trevor Rex, Claire Shu, Ada Throckmorton, Miranda Alfano-Smith, Jared Sun, Michael Vela, and Thomas Zhao.

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enrich our work in this text. In addition, we'd especially like to recognize those colleagues who provided us with particular guidance or graciously allowed us to include versions of their exemplary class-tested activities in this new edition: Mary Stroud, who contributed the Twitter dialogue of sources activity in Chapter 5; Marvin Diogenes and Ethan Plaut, who permitted us to use a version of their Accordion prewrite activity in Chapter 4; Russ Carpenter and Sohui Lee, whose scholarship on poster design informed our section on that topic in Chapter 8; Sarah Pittock, whose activity on titles inspired our own expanded section; and Jennifer Stonaker, who provided insight and guidance on the rhetoric of podcasting. So much of what we've accomplished over our years of work on the *Envision* series has been possible by the supportive atmosphere found in our academic home in Stanford's Program in Writing and Rhetoric; the people and the program continually remind us of the importance of providing the best resources and instruction to students and of fostering a culture of intellectual curiosity, sharing, and collegiality among our teaching faculty.

We'd also like to extend out thanks to our expert team at Pearson, the dedicated drivers of the *Envision* series: Joe Opiela and Brad Potthoff; our development editor David Kear; Katy Gabel and her staff at Lumina; our contract support Jim Miller; and Michael Greer, who went from guiding the drafting of the first edition of *Envision* to now helping us refresh and reinvigorate the reader section of the most recent edition of *Envision in Depth*.

Of course, there's another expert team to thank as well: Our friends and family who keep life running smoothly even amid the creative chaos of writing and revision. Without their love, support, and expansive understanding, this revision would never have been transformed from a marked-up manuscript to the bound copy that now sits before you.

Lastly, thank you, our readers, for your interest in *Envision*; we hope you find the book as useful to your teaching as it has been rewarding for us to work on and use with our own students over the years.

Christine L. Alfano and Alyssa J. O'Brien

Envision

WRITING AND RESEARCHING ARGUMENTS

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Part I

ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENT

CHAPTER 1
Analyzing Texts and Writing Thesis Statements

CHAPTER 2
Understanding Strategies of Persuasion

CHAPTER 3
Composing Arguments

CHAPTER 1

Analyzing Texts and Writing Thesis Statements

Chapter Preview Questions

1.1 How do we read and analyze texts rhetorically?
1.2 How do we define the rhetorical situation?
1.3 How do exigence and purpose affect persuasion?
1.4 What are effective strategies for analyzing rhetorical texts?
1.5 How should I brainstorm parts of an essay, including the thesis statement?

Everywhere around us, words and images try to persuade us to think about the world in certain ways. We can see this persuasive power at every turn: from newspaper articles to television broadcasts, blog posts, advertisements, political campaign posters, Facebook status posts, tweets, and even video footage circulated online. In each case, such texts—whether verbal, visual, or a combination of the two—try to move us, convince us to buy something, shape our opinions, or make us laugh.

Consider the text in Figure 1.1 by Mike Luckovich, a Pulitzer Prize–winning cartoonist who publishes in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. Luckovich created this cartoon after the 2011 assassination attempt on Gabrielle Giffords, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives, outside a Safeway store in Tucson, Arizona. Six people were killed, including a 9-year-old girl. Giffords herself was critically injured, along with 12 other people. The incident raised concerns over political speeches and Website images that had used gun metaphors to target Democrats such as Giffords in upcoming elections. Some feared that such language and imagery might have contributed to the attack. In response to the controversy, Luckovich composed a cartoon as a persuasive text indicating his view. How does his text use both words and images to persuade audiences to think a certain way about the top term: "Violent Rhetoric"? Look at the hierarchy of values, beginning with "happy talk" at the bottom, moving through

"warm conversation" and "friendly debate" to a more vigorous "spirited discussion." Notice how the words then become more negative, including "angry discourse" and "hateful speech." While we usually consider "hateful speech" to be the worst form of communication, Luckovich places "violent rhetoric" above it, as the very apex of dangerous discourse. The cartoon is ironic since when most people think of *rhetoric*, they often think of political rhetoric, which they perceive as either empty and meaningless (all talk, no action) or worse, as negative: harmful to the reputation of others, fear-mongering, and even hateful. The cartoon emphasizes this common view placing the words "violent rhetoric" at the top.

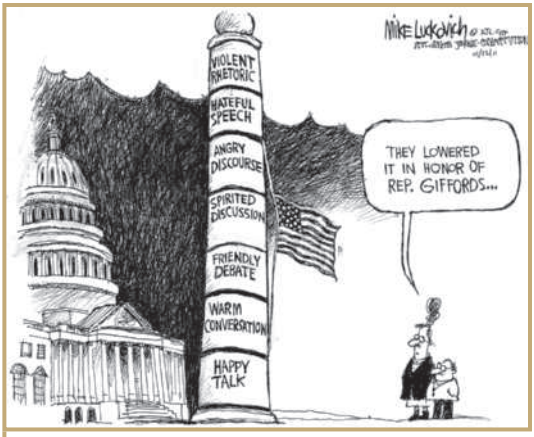

FIGURE 1.1 Mike Luckovich's political cartoon demonstrates through words and images how people commonly view "rhetoric" as a negative and dangerous form of communication.

But understanding this cartoon depends not just on analyzing the words. The location of words in particular places within the visual—and the visual elements themselves—also contribute in crucial ways to the meaning of the text. The lowered flag, for instance, might indicate that Giffords nearly died from her critical injuries, and indeed six people did die. The purposeful lowering of the flag to half-mast is itself a form of visual communication, well understood across America; it represents the nation's act of honoring a deceased person. The dome of the Capitol Building in the background suggests that the government has lowered the flag and wants people to move from "violent rhetoric" to "spirited discussion." In this way, the cartoon combines words and visual details to suggest both a tribute to Giffords and the need for calmer, gentler political communication. That is our understanding of the cartoon's argument when we **analyze the text rhetorically**. As you develop your skills of critical thinking and rhetorical analysis, you will also learn how to interpret and write your own arguments about such texts.

At the same time, you will learn how to apply your skills of analysis across a range of media, including printed or spoken words. With regard to the assassination attempt, many writers commented on the event through newspaper articles, on blogs, via email, and on social media. In a post on the political blog *Daily Kos*, for example, Barbara Morrill used the term *rhetoric*

right in her title: "Violent Rhetoric and the Attempted Assassination of Gabrielle Giffords." While the title seems objective in tone, the writer draws on very strong language in the opening paragraph in order to connect the two parts of the title:

> In the two days since the attempted assassination of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, the debate has been raging over the culpability of the violent rhetoric that is so commonplace in today's political climate. Which of course has led to the rapid-fire peddling of false equivalencies by the right, where now, saying a congressional district is being targeted is the same as actually putting crosshairs on a district and saying it's time to "RELOAD."

By accusing the right of "rapid-fire peddling," the author frames words through a gun metaphor in a way that creates a vivid image in the reader's mind. She also refers to the metaphoric language that politicians had used—targeting a district, crosshairs, and "reload"—as evidence for her claim. The details of her written text parallel the elements of the cartoon (Figure 1.1). As you develop your skills of analysis about texts, keep in mind that you can understand them better if you look closely at all the specific elements, whether verbal or visual. Once you recognize how texts function *rhetorically*—that is, how texts try to persuade you and shape your opinion about the world around you—then you can decide whether or not to agree with the many messages you encounter every day. To grasp this concept, let's follow one hypothetical student—we'll call her Alex—as she walks across campus and note the rhetorical texts she sees along the way.

1.1 How do we read and analyze texts rhetorically?

UNDERSTANDING TEXTS RHETORICALLY

By shadowing Alex and noticing what she notices, you can construct her **personal narrative**, or written account of her journey, about the rhetorical texts she sees along the way.

Let's begin in her dorm room, which Alex and her roommate have decorated with a concert tour poster, an artsy map of New York City, a poster for the women's basketball team, and a photo collage of pictures from their spring break cross-country trip. As she prepares to leave, she smiles as she glances at a meme she's printed and taped over her desk: the black-turtleneck-wearing Hipster Barista, with the caption, "$120,000 Art Degree … Draws faces in latte foam."

As Alex walks down the hall, she pauses when a friend calls her into the lounge to watch a brief clip from a rerun of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* on his laptop. Oliver is in top form, providing a satirical critique of the militarization of American police forces, and Alex and her friend laugh for a few minutes about the sketch before she heads out. Walking down the stairwell, she glances briefly at the flyers that decorate the walls—for a charity dance for the victims of a recent earthquake, a dorm meeting about a ski trip, and a rally against immigration laws. She does a double-take to look at the clever design of a flyer for the Zen club (see Figure 1.2), making a mental note about the meeting time, and then walks into the cool autumn air.

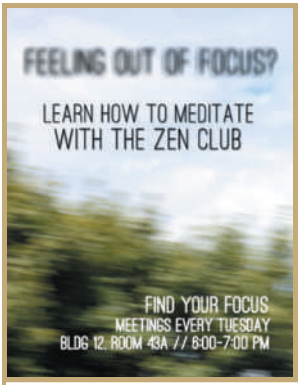

FIGURE 1.2 A flyer that Alex notices on her way to class.

Outside, Alex looks down at her smartphone, scrolling through recent Instagram posts as she walks along. She sees one friend's updated profile photo, another's pictures from a recent trip to New Orleans, and a third's reposting of a link to a parody video of a Taylor Swift song. She stops at the outdoor café and checks her Twitter feed while waiting for her coffee, amused by her favorite celebrity's posting about the Academy Awards. As her coffee arrives, her phone buzzes, and she opens a funny Snapchat photo from her younger sister, pausing for a moment to send a selfie of her own, which she captions with the phrase, "Must have coffee." Looking at the time, she realizes she's running late and hurries off to class.

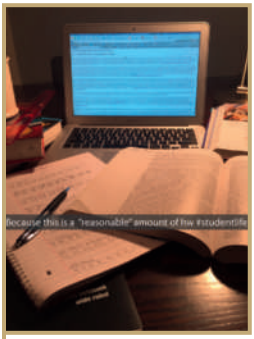

FIGURE 1.3 A snapchat from Alex's younger sister.

Now Alex has only 2 minutes before class starts, so she takes the shortcut through the student union, past a sign advertising the latest Apple laptop, and then heads outside and crosses in front of an administration building where a group of student protestors are chanting and waving signs demanding that the university divest from fossil fuels. She weaves alongside a cluster of gleaming steel buildings that constitute the engineering quad and passes the thin metal sculpture called *Knowledge* that guards the entrance to the library.

Finally she reaches her destination: the Communications department. Walking into the building, she stops to glance at the front page of the school newspaper, stacked by the door; intrigued by the headline, "Greek Life Claims University Targets Them," she grabs a copy to read later. She

slips into the classroom for her Com 101 class on Media and Society and realizes that the class has already started. Ducking into the back row, Alex watches the professor advance his PowerPoint slides to one containing key questions for that day's class (see Figure 1.4). As she sits down, the TA passes her a handout, and she opens her laptop to take notes. She's immediately distracted by posts on the social media sites that pop up, calling for her attention: targeted advertisements, viral videos, even Buzzfeed quizzes. Ignoring them, she opens a blank document instead and then turns to examine the handout, which includes an editorial about a tragic shooting at the offices of a French satirical magazine.

With Alex safely at her seat, think about how many texts you noticed along her journey. Flyers, ads, posters, videos, Websites, newspapers, television shows, photographs, memes, sculpture, signs, PowerPoint slides, even architectural design: each is an example of rhetoric. Why? Because each text offers a specific message to a particular audience. Each one is a persuasive act. Once you begin to look at the world rhetorically, you'll see that just about everywhere you are being persuaded to agree, act, buy, attend, or accept an argument: rhetoric permeates our cultural landscape. Just as we did above, you might pay attention to the rhetorical texts that you find on your way to class and then construct your own personal narrative consisting of words and images. Learning to recognize the persuasive power of texts and read them rhetorically is the first step in thinking critically about the world.

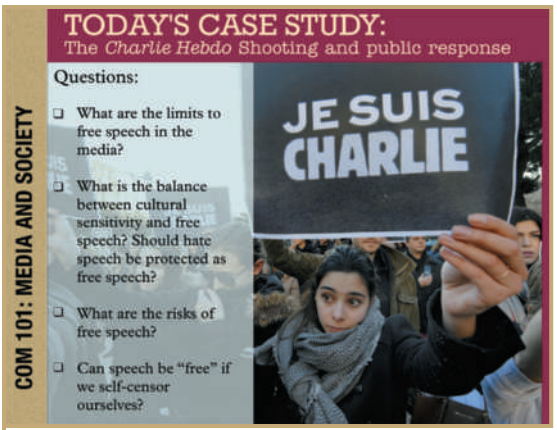

FIGURE 1.4 PowerPoint slide from Alex's class.

WRITER'S PRACTICE

MyWritingLab

Look back at the texts that Alex encountered in Figures 1.2, 1.3, and 1.4. How do they attempt to persuade their audience? For each one, jot down some notes about each text's message and the different ways the texts try to make their arguments. Consider how they use words and images, alone and in combination, to convey their message.

UNDERSTANDING THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

1.2 How do we define the rhetorical situation?

In one of the earliest definitions, the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle characterized **rhetoric** as *the ability to see the available means of persuasion in any given situation*. While Aristotle's lessons in rhetoric emerged in the fourth century BCE as a form of instruction for oral communication—specifically, to help free men represent themselves in court—today, the term *rhetoric* has expanded to include any verbal, visual, or multimedia text that aims to persuade a specific audience in a certain place and time. More generally, you can understand rhetoric as the strategies people use to convey ideas; in the words of scholar and rhetorician Andrea Lunsford, "Rhetoric is the art, practice, and study of human communication."

To understand how a rhetorical text works, you need to analyze how it targets a specific **audience**, how it has been composed by a specific **author**, and how it conveys a particular **argument**. This dynamic relationship is called the **rhetorical situation**, and we have represented it with a triangle in Figure 1.5.

As a writer, when you compose persuasive texts, you need to determine which strategies will work to convince your audience in a particular situation. There are many different choices to consider, and that is why rhetoric is both a dynamic and a practical art. Imagine, for instance, that you are involved in the following rhetorical situations and have to decide which strategies would be most persuasive for each case.

- **Attend to *audience.*** If you were a politician writing an editorial for a newspaper or speaking at an interview on CNN about your definition of marriage, you would use strikingly different metaphors and statistics depending on which constituency (or *audience*) you are addressing.
- **Attend to *author.*** If you wanted to publicize a

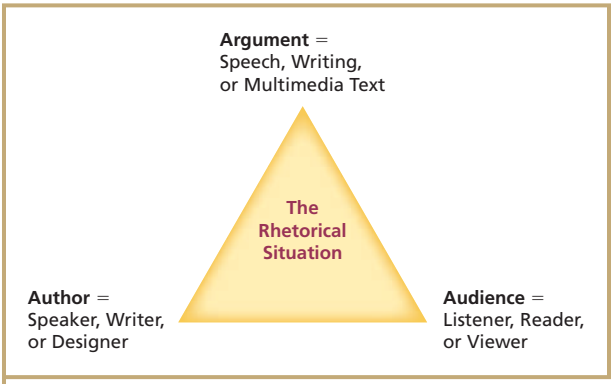

FIGURE 1.5 The rhetorical situation is dynamic and governs all communication, whether oral, written, or multimedia.

message against drug use to local middle school students, you might compose pamphlets, emails, presentations, or posters with information graphics, and each one would be designed based on your position as *author*—teacher or police officer? student or parent?—while trying to reach that teenage audience.

- **Attend to *argument.*** If you were fashion industry intern updating the company's social media marketing campaign, you would revise the message (or *argument*) of the advertisements to fit the media, whether Facebook posts, tweets, or even Internet videos.

Cartoonist Jorge Cham offers us an example in Figure 1.6 of how the rhetorical situation affects persuasion in relation to a communicative act that might be even more familiar to you: a students' email to the instructor. In a panel for his series *PhD comics*, he shows how a misunderstanding of the rhetorical situation can sabotage successful communication.

What the comic illustrates is the instructor's analysis of the student's communication and his implicit criticism that the student misreads his *audience* and therefore composes an ineffective *argument.* The agitated arrows point us to evidence for this interpretation: misspellings, punctuation mistakes, jargon, and an uninformed message (the answers to the email apparently are all in the syllabus). However, the comic also invites us to critique the instructor's assessment of the rhetorical situation. On the one hand, the fictional instructor has treated the email communication like an essay, scoring it with red-inked annotations; on the other, he uses an angry voice that seems inappropriate to the instructor–student relationship ("OMG, what are you, 14?"; "we are not friends"). In both cases, he fails in the same way as his student to create a moment of effective communication.

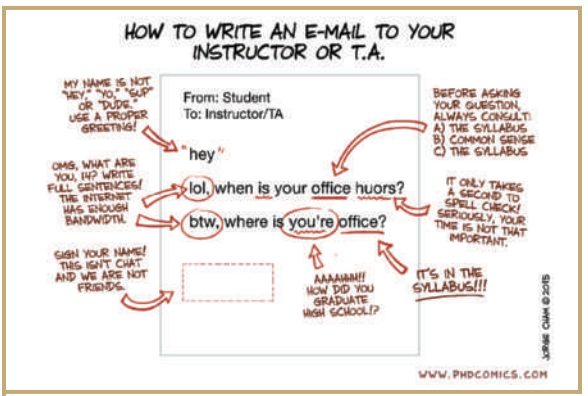

FIGURE 1.6 This comic from *PhD comics* offers a pointed analysis of a hypothetical student's misjudging of the rhetorical situation in emailing his instructor.

In fact, there are two layers to this cartoon, two rhetorical situations that we can explore (see Figure 1.7): the fictional situation of the email, where the relationship is between student (writer), instructor (audience), and

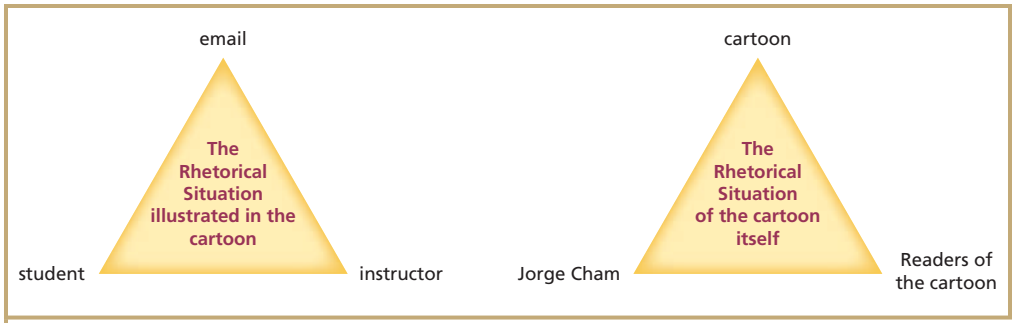

FIGURE 1.7 The cartoon's two rhetorical situations.

email (argument), and then the rhetorical situation of the editorial cartoon itself, which triangulates the relationship between Jorge Cham (writer), the cartoon's readers (audience), and cartoon (argument). Cham encourages us to engage with both levels explicitly by including the asterisk and footnote. In his qualifier, "No offense to those actually called 'Hey,' 'Yo,' 'Sup,' or 'Dude,'" he differentiates his own voice from that of the fictional instructor, helping us remember there are dual levels at work in the cartoon.

UNDERSTANDING EXIGENCE AND PURPOSE

1.3 How do exigence and purpose affect persuasion?

As you move toward better understanding rhetoric, another important concept to consider is **exigence**—the *urgent demand* that writers feel to respond to a situation, his or her motive for writing. Have you ever seen a news article or heard about an event on campus that prompted you to respond strongly? When this happens, in rhetoric, we call this the **exigencies of a situation**, or the demands put on a writer to respond immediately and urgently in the attempt to take action or raise a concern about a specific problem or issue.

Think about tweets sent out in response to a sports team winning a championship, a flash of celebrity gossip, a political debate, or a crisis on campus. These are all contemporary instances of exigency. The scholar who gave us the rhetorical situation shown in Figure 1.5, Lloyd Bitzer, emphasized that *rhetorical exigency* happens when change is possible: "An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification *requires* discourse or can be *assisted* by discourse." That is, rhetorical exigency exists when there is the possibility that **discourse** (i.e., forms of